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ABSTRACT

The Best and Brightest Program at Central Missouri State University (CMSU) encourages talented high school students to enter the teaching profession. High school students with effective teacher attributes are nominated, through collaboration among university personnel, elementary secondary practitioners, educational organizations, and alumni. These students are contacted directly by university personnel and urged to pursue university studies in education. The students are invited to Career Day for Talented Students in Education, where they receive an overview of career opportunities in education and the university's teacher education program. Nominations are aligned with state and university scholarship programs designed to provide financial incentives for the students. Evaluation of the program indicates it has led to a significant increase in Missouri Teacher Education Scholarships received by students planning to attend CMSU and in the percentage of freshmen distinguished scholar candidates committed to teacher education. From the first to the second year of the program, there was a 78 percent increase in nominations and a 99 percent increase in enrollment of talented students. The model has been recognized by the Missouri Department of Education as an exemplary recruitment method. (Contains 11 references.) (JDD)

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Recruiting Bright Students Into Education: A Collaborative Effort

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Abstract

Central's Best and Brightest Program directly and systematically addressed the challenge of encouraging talented high school students to enter the teaching profession. Collaboration among university personnel, K-12 practitioners, educational organizations and alumni generated nominations of high school students with effective teacher attributes. Students thus nominated were contacted directly by university personnel and urged to pursue university studies in education. Nominations were aligned with state and university scholarship programs designed to provide financial incentives for competing bright students. Pre-established procedures for evaluating the program indicated that it was highly successful in its first two years. Furthermore, the program is one which can easily be replicated by other institutions seeking to recruit bright students into their teacher education program. It has been recognized as an exemplary model by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

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Introduction

The teaching profession needs to attract talented individuals who are capable of understanding our complex world and are willing to assist our youth in determining significantly better ways to address the myriad of challenges they will surely face. In our modern society such individuals are often encouraged to enter other professions. Unfortunately, the education profession has suffered from image problems while other professions, especially in the area of business, have become more attractive. These and other demographic and economic changes in our society have made it increasingly difficult to attract talented young people into education. While this task is not impossible, it does require teacher education programs to seek new and innovative ways to identify and recruit members. This article provides a collaborative, easily replicable, model for institutions to consider in addressing this challenge.

Many analyses of the teaching profession and its importance to the future of our society have supported the need for attracting talented individuals to the profession. As stated by the Research and Policy Committee for Economic Development, " the recruitment, selection, and preparation of teachers are critical ingredients for improving the quality of teaching" (1985, p. 76). Kapel, Mour, and Kapel studied eight major reports addressing educational reform in 1987. They concluded that "the one facet of educational reform expressed in all reports is the need to attract students who possess higher academic skills and qualities than those now entering teaching" (p. 22). Likewise, their review of the professional literature in the late 1970's and the early 1980's strongly suggested that academically talented students were not being attracted to teaching as a profession. Another study reporting the decline in the number of bright students selecting teaching as a career was done by the South Carolina Educational Policy Center at the University of South Carolina. They reported that the average SAT for all education majors was 792 while those of engineering majors was 944, and the average SAT for all South

Carolina freshmen was 832 (Berry, Kuhs, Ginsberg, & Cook, 1988).

This documented need obviously poses a considerable challenge to colleges of education. As the following quote states: "If the best students are not knocking on the doors of schools and colleges of education, then these institutions ought to go out and get them. If the ablest students are deciding as undergraduates to major in mathematics, science, and the liberal arts, then they are the ones who should be induced to accept jobs in the public schools. The work to be done in the nation's classrooms is too important to be left to the mediocre" (Maeroff, 1983, p. 29). Echoing this concern, Tack (1986) has argued that teacher educators must implement aggressive recruiting programs to attract these top students and begin enhancing the image of teacher preparation programs. A review of the literature from the mid-1980's. until the present, however, reveals a paucity of literature describing institutional responses to this challenge.

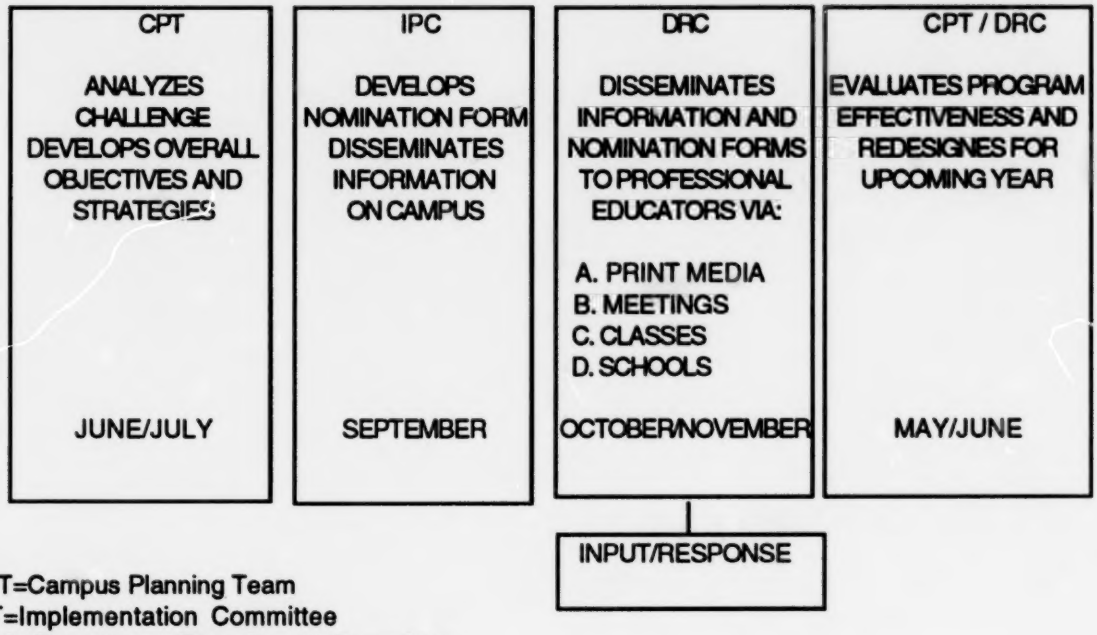
Initiating the program

Central Missouri State University 's central administrators and teacher educators, aware of the national concern with this issue, were convinced that bringing talented students to and through the teacher education program was vital to the development of more capable teachers; teachers able to "teach more students more" and to meet the ongoing challenges of educating students for the twenty-first century. Therefore, a planning committee consisting of the Dean of the College of Education and Human Services, the Director of Admissions, the Director of Clinical Services and Certification, the University Scholarship Officer, the Chair of Curriculum and Instruction Department's Scholarship Committee, and the Chair of the Curriculum and Instruction Department met to address the challenge of attracting more talented students to their teacher education program. This initial planning committee thoroughly

discussed the challenge and then identified goals, evaluation criteria and procedures to be initiated.

Talented Student Recruitment Model

Figure 1



CPT=Campus Planning Team
IPT=Implementation Committee
DRC=Department Recruitment Committee

The first goal established by this group was to increase the number of talented students entering the University's teacher education program. The second goal was to develop a system for collaboration with the campus community and the K-12 public school community to address the need for recruiting talented students into the teaching profession. Discussions with present teacher education students led the recruitment committee to believe that many practitioners were in fact discouraging bright students from entering their own profession. Furthermore, the committee recognized that like many other university settings, teacher education suffered from an image problem on its own campus.

The program design

The Best and Brightest Program emerged as a result of this committee's initial dialogue. The concept basically involves inviting nominations of high school seniors from those who know the teaching profession and prospective teachers best, the K-12 practitioners. Since the quality of schooling between schools and universities is virtually inseperable, it only made sense to develop a format that would link the two together as partners (Goodlad, 1991-92). Figure 1 provides an outline for the development of this talented student recruitment model.

There were two purposes for soliciting nominations from K-12 practitioners. The first reason was the belief that K-12 practitioners had a sure sense of the difficulty inherent in measuring aspects of teaching; intangible aspects like the ability to motivate and lead others, dedication to public service, and effective communication skills with a broad range of people. The belief was that, if invited to recommend students, public school colleagues would consider these intangibles as well as the high academic standards being advocated. The second reason for inviting practitioner nominations was to provide a positive forum for addressing the tendency of professional educators to actively discourage young people from entering their profession. This active discouragement has been documented in the professional literature. Bell and Steinmiller (1989) state that "Counselors often recommend other career choices for the brightest students and discourage them from teaching as a career choice" (p. 6). A study of career choices by high school students found that the top choices for talented students were engineering, medicine, law, business, and high technology, choices also selected for top students by their teachers (Lucas, 1985). Researchers have concluded that "academically talented students may, from their earliest inquiries, be specifically directed toward careers other than teaching" and that " few classroom teachers, guidance counselors, or teacher education programs actively recruit academically talented students(to teaching)" (Otis-Wilborn, Sears, and Marshall, 1988, p. 8). Thus, the committee concluded that the process of communicating the request for

nominations could provide a positive, indirect forum for stressing the need to present the positives about a teaching career to talented students and the need to employ them upon graduation.

A recruitment committee in the Curriculum and Instruction Department was established comprised of three faculty members and a Distinguished Scholar Award recipient serving as a student member. A nomination form for recommending the Best and Brightest Students was then developed for distribution to the area high schools. See Appendix I.

First-Year Implementation Process

While high school counselors are the main source for identification of potentially bright students, they are not the only source. Furthermore, counselors are often bombarded with forms internally as well as from numerous external sources. They, also, may not have sufficient contact with students to know whether they would, in fact, make an excellent teacher. The Department Recruitment Committee, therefore, sought to distribute information about the program and the nomination form through various means. The CMSU Alumni News was used to solicit nominations from alumni around the country. A description of the program and a nomination form were also incorporated into the local Phi Delta Kappa and Reading Center newsletters. These newsletters allowed information about the program to reach a large number of educators throughout the state. Readers of such publications are generally individuals interested in programs designed for academically bright students.

Presentations about the program were made and nomination forms were distributed at district and state meetings of teachers, principals, and superintendents. Administrators often commented that the program supported their own efforts to recruit educators who would enhance their districts efforts to promote excellence in education. While principals and superintendents personally did not often submit a candidate's name, they were more likely to

mention the program to their staff. Indirectly, this encouraged teachers, who in fact had more direct contact with the best and brightest students in the school, to submit nominations.

Nomination forms were distributed to school educators in graduate classes. Additionally, professional education faculty members on campus were asked to support the program by encouraging their colleagues in the secondary schools to nominate candidates. These interactions provided an additional opportunity to extol the importance of the education profession to individuals who seldom get sufficient recognition for their work.

A final and important means of disbursing information about the Best and Brightest Program during this first year of implementation was the personal delivery of nomination forms to area school personnel. Utilizing a faculty member who was well known and highly respected by educators to promote the program to key people in the public schools was very effective.

Responding to nominations

When the Dean of Education and Human Services received the completed nomination forms, a letter of congratulations was sent to the student and a letter of appreciation was sent to the nominator. Nominations were then forwarded to the Curriculum and Instruction Department's recruitment committee and the Admissions office. The Admissions office sent each nominated student information regarding the university's program and other scholarships available to them. A letter of congratulations on their nomination was then sent to each student by the chair of the Curriculum and Instruction Department. Office secretarial personnel constructed a data base of all the nominations received for follow-up purposes during the remainder of the year. This list was also used to verify ACT scores of those students whose scores were sent to the university. The chair of the department's recruitment committee sent

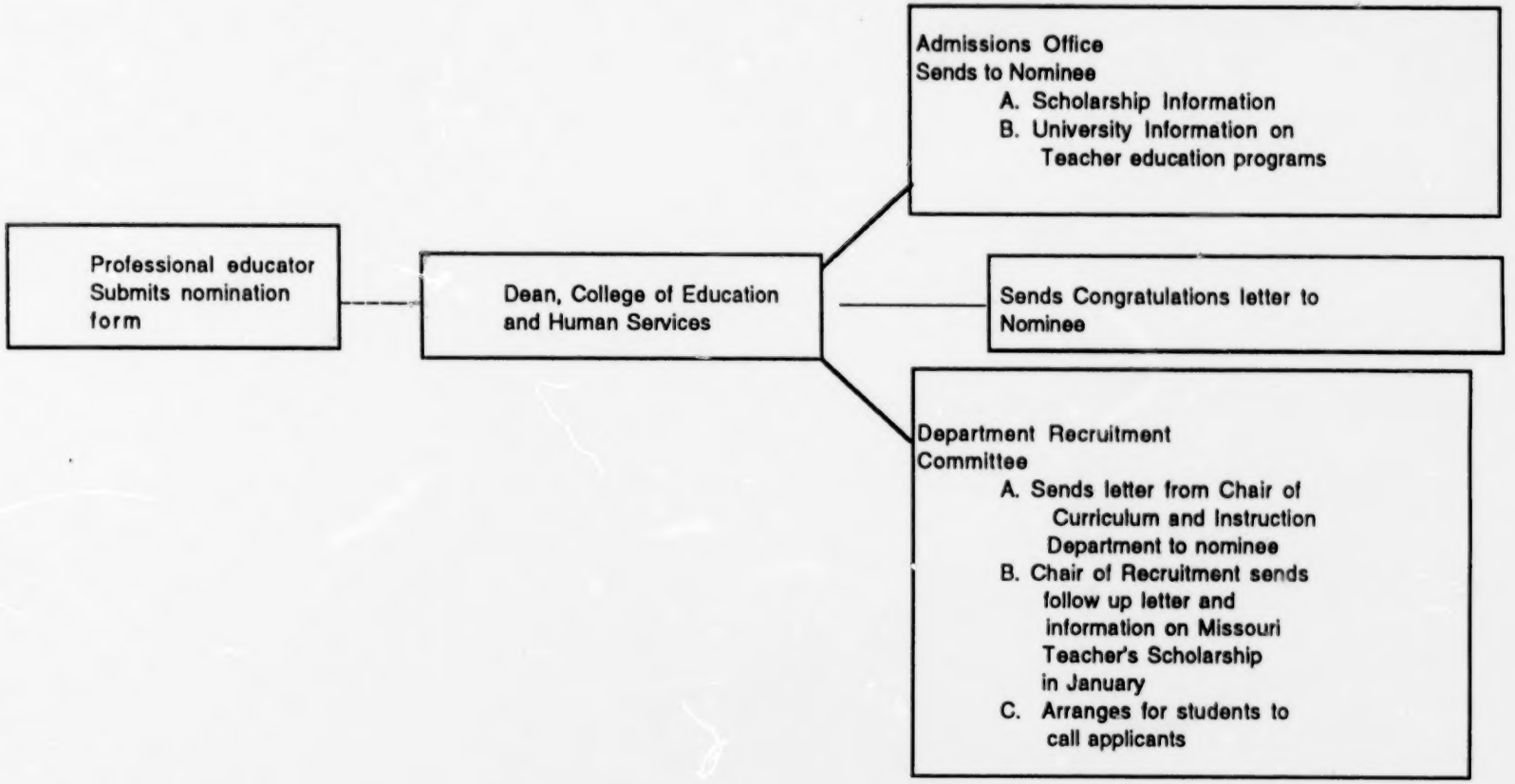
each nominee, whose ACT score qualified him/her for the Missouri Teacher Scholarship, information regarding application for the scholarship and a letter supporting their interest in teaching as a career in January. (See Figure 2) Many students responded directly to the offer of assistance in applying for available scholarships by calling either the University's Scholarship Officer or the Chair of the Recruitment Committee.

Internally, departmental policies for awarding scholarships were realigned with the program's goals. An internal University grant was written and funded to provide direct scholarship assistance to nominees; thirteen such scholarships were awarded the first year.

A concluding first-year component was the spring Career Day for Talented Students in Education. During this day, the nominated students were introduced to key university personnel, including the University President, and were given an overview of the career opportunities in education and the university's teacher education program.

Flow Chart for Responding to Nominations

Figure 2



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Evaluation and Redesign

During the following summer, members of the original Planning Committee, the Department's Recruitment Committee, and secretarial personnel met to review the program's first year and to develop improvements for the second year. During the initial planning stage, a set of criteria had been established to assess the program's effectiveness in attaining two goals. Questions relevant to increasing the number of talented students entering the University's teacher education program included:

A. Will the number of students entering Central Missouri State University with a Missouri State Teacher Education Scholarship increase significantly?

B. Will a significant number of University Distinguished Scholars and a significant number of University Scholars be students preparing to enter the teaching profession?

C. Will the program attract significant numbers of nominations and will a significant percentage of those nominated enroll at CMSU in teacher education?

D. Will the average ACT scores of the students enrolling in the teacher education program as a result of this effort be higher than those enrolled otherwise.

Questions regarding collaboration with professional educators and university personnel included:

A. Will university departments/faculty accept presentations on the Best and Brightest program and promote the nominations for the program through their contacts and through their mailings/newsletters?

B. Will professional educators accept information on the program and encourage talented students by nominating them?

Utilizing the above criteria, the program was judged to be an initial success due to the significant increase in Missouri Teacher Education Scholarships received by students planning

to attend CMSU (from ten to 28), the significant percentage of freshmen distinguished scholar candidates committed to teacher education, and the pervasive discussion generated on-campus and off-campus about the importance of attracting talented high school students to the teaching profession. The planners, therefore, decided to continue the program into year two.

Consequently, the Planning Committee and Recruitment Committee worked together to identify a more precise timeline for the completion of each step in the future and resolved several small procedural problems including a redesign of the nomination form to include the students social security number to allow easier follow-up of each student. They, also, concluded that personal trips to the schools would be conducted every other year and that the Career Day for Talented Students in Teacher Education would be eliminated. The committee concluded that both of these efforts were essential in the program's first year and gave it high visibility. However, the Planning Committee determined that the program could function successfully during the second year without them and much faculty time could be redirected to other needs.

Implementation In the Second Year

The Department's Recruitment Committee implemented the revised procedures in year two. They also decided to add two other activities in the spring semester. The first utilized the services of ten members of Kappa Delta Pi's Rho Chapter to make personal phone calls to those students nominated with ACT scores above 25. The participants asked each Best and Brightest nominee if s/he had any specific concerns about Central's teacher education program, campus life or the application process. Approximately 50 nominees or their parents were contacted. The second activity initiated was to send a follow-up letter to each person who had nominated an individual for the Best and Brightest Program thanking him/her for their efforts. The letter, likewise, reiterated the importance of the teaching profession and encouraged them to again nominate individuals the following year.

Data related to the achievement of the stated goals

At the end of the second year, the two committees again met to assess the program according to the criteria set for each goal. The following represents the results; and, the reasons why this model has been evaluated by the Missouri Department of Education as an Exemplary Recruitment method.

Goal One: The number of Missouri Teacher Education Program scholarships awarded to Central Missouri State University students increased by 280 percent in the first year of the program and by 360 percent over the first two years of the program. In the spring of the first year, the Missouri Teacher Education Scholarship Selection Committee awarded ten scholarships to high school seniors planning to attend Central. The following spring, the Missouri Teacher Education Scholarship Selection Committee awarded 28 scholarships to prospective Central students; and in the third year, 36 candidates for the teaching profession enrolled at the university as recipients of these coveted scholarships.

Prospective teacher education freshmen also competed successfully for Central's Distinguished Scholar Awards, the University's highest undergraduate scholarship. Fifty-two talented high school students were invited to the campus to compete for these awards in the initial year of this program and 15 of those 52 were planning to enter the teaching profession. Thus, on a campus with 11,000 students and approximately sixteen percent engaged in teacher education, twenty-nine percent of those invited were education students. Twenty-seven percent of those awarded the prestigious (all expenses paid: room, board, tuition, books) Distinguished Scholar Award were prospective education majors. In the spring of 1991, education majors, while comprising approximately sixteen percent of the campus population, garnered forty-four percent of these awards. Thus, it was clearly demonstrated that education majors were among the top students on campus.

In the first year, 178 nominations of talented students for teacher education were

received and 80 (45 percent) enrolled at the university. In the second year, a total of 318 nominations were received and 159 (50 percent) attended. Therefore, from the first to the second year of the program, there was a 78 percent increase in nominations, and a 99 percent increase in enrollment of talented students in the university's education program.

Goal Two: The campus community and the K-12 educators enthusiastically engaged in the program process. Presentations on the Best and Brightest program were made to the Central Missouri Superintendents' Association, the Central Missouri Elementary Principals' Association, the Central Missouri Secondary Principals' Association, the Deans' Cabinet, the Academic Council, the secondary methods professors and the Professional Education Faculty. The nomination form was included in the Phi Delta Kappa newsletter, the Reading newsletter, the Alumni News, the campus student newspaper, and in several mailings to constituent groups. Many faculty delivered the nomination forms in person during their supervision visits to the schools. University advancement personnel distributed them at conventions around the state. The University's public relations office publicized the program in print, on the radio and on television. Most importantly, however, was the willingness of classroom teachers to collaborate with university personnel by identifying and recommending those students who would best represent the education profession.

Summary

The design and implementation of any recruitment program by a university requires careful planning of the details. Special attention must given to the implemention process and the participants. Central Missouri's Best and Brightest Program appears to have made significant progress toward meeting this latter concern. The key factor in the program's success has been the active and genuine collaboration among public school personnel, the University's central administration, pre-service teachers, faculty in other colleges at the

University, and faculty in the College of Education and Human Services.

The professional literature related to teacher education reform, and educational reform in general, has argued strongly for positive efforts to attract the best and brightest to the teaching profession. Furthermore, AACTE, Goodlad and others have argued that school leaders must be actively involved in the recruitment and selection of prospective teachers (Clark, 1991). The Best and Brightest Program represents such an effort; and hence, has consistently received 'high marks' by accrediting agencies.

Individuals from other institutions around the country, who have heard of this program at national meetings, have consistently commented on how easily they might adapt the program to their own settings. The model presented, therefore, is recommended as a low-cost, easily replicable collaborative approach, for teacher education institutions and public schools which seek to increase the number of bright students entering the education profession.

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Appendix 1

Nomination Form
for
Outstanding High School Students
for the
Teaching Profession

Central Missouri State University's College of Education and Human Services is committed to recruiting "The Best and The Brightest" students to the teaching profession. You can help us meet our goal by nominating a student who in your opinion fits this description. We appreciate your cooperation in this effort.

As a person interested in the education profession, I recommend this student to Central Missouri State University as a person with excellent potential for becoming an outstanding teacher.

Name _____ Year of high school graduation _____

High School _____ School District _____

Home Mailing Address _____

_____

Home Phone Number _____ ACT (optional) _____

Class Rank (optional) _____ GPA (optional) _____

May we use your name in the nomination process? Yes _____ No _____

Nominator's Name _____

Mailing Address _____

_____

Phone Number _____

Please return to: Dr. Joe Huber
Dean, College of Education and Human Services
Lovinger 213
Central Missouri State University
Warrensburg, MO 64093

CMSU 1196 - 88